

Kaska language

The **Kaska language** originated from the family of Athabaskan languages.^[4] Traditionally Kaska is an oral aboriginal language that is used by the Kaska Dena people.^[5] The Kaska Dene region consists of a small area in the Southwestern part of the Northwest Territories, the Southeastern part of Yukon Territory, and the Northern part of British Columbia.^{[4][5]} The communities that are in the Kaska Dene region are Fort Ware in N.W.T.; Ross River and Watson Lake in Y.T.; Dease Lake, Good Hope Lake, Lower Post, Fireside, and Muncho Lake in B.C.^{[4][5][6]} Kaska is made up of eight dialects.^[7] All of which have similar pronunciations and expressional terms.^{[5][7]} The town of Watson Lake was established around the period of the second World War when the Alaska Highway was first build in 1942.^[6] A major consequence of colonization was Kaska language loss.^{[5][6]} Another major cause of Kaska language loss was due to the residential school. The effect that these schools had on the Kaska language have caused a language gap between two generations resulting in few young speakers.

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Kaska	
Dene Zágé’	
Native to	Canada
Ethnicity	1,435 Kaska (2016 census) ^[1]
Native speakers	240 (2016 census) ^[2]
Language family	Dené–Yeniseian? <div> <div>▪ Na-Dené</div> <div>▪ Athabaskan</div> <div>▪ Northern Athabaskan</div> <div>▪ Central Cordillera</div> <div>▪ Kaska</div> </div>
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	kkz
Glottolog	kask1239 (http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/kask1239) ^[3]

Phonetics

Consonants

		<u>Labial</u>	<u>Alveolar</u>		<u>Post-al. /Palatal</u>	<u>Velar</u>	<u>Glottal</u>
			<u>central</u>	<u>lateral</u>			
<u>Nasal</u>	plain	<u>m</u>	<u>n</u>				
	glottalized						
<u>Stop</u>	<u>tenuis</u> /aspirated	<u>p</u> <u>p^h</u>	<u>t</u> <u>t^h</u>			<u>k</u> <u>k^h</u>	<u>ʔ</u>
	ejective		<u>t'</u>			<u>k'</u>	
<u>Affricate</u>	voiceless /voiced		<u>ts</u> <u>ts^h</u>	<u>tʃ</u> <u>tʃ^h</u>	<u>tʃ</u> <u>tʃ^h</u>		
	ejective		<u>ts'</u>	<u>tʃ'</u>	<u>tʃ'</u>		
<u>Fricative</u>	voiceless /voiced	<u>f</u>	<u>s</u> <u>z</u>	<u>ʃ</u>	<u>ʃ</u> <u>ʒ</u>	<u>ɸ</u>	<u>h</u>
	glottalized						
<u>Approximant</u>	plain			<u>l</u>	<u>j</u>		
	glottalized						
<u>Rhotic</u>	plain		<u>r</u>				
	glottalized						

Vowels

Kaska makes use of the vowels /a/, /e/, /i/, /o/, and /u/, which, through various combinations of inflection (high, falling, and rising tone), lengthening and nasalization, produce about 60 vowel sounds in total.

Morphology^[8]

Kaska is a polysynthetic language, commonly featuring sentence words. It is head-final, availing nine prefix positions to a given stem verb morpheme. Kaska does not mark for control or grammatical gender. (Sexual gender is often implied in narratives through contextual association with the prevalent gender roles of Kaska society, particularly with regard to warfare.)

The Verb-Sentence

Verb-sentences, or single-word sentences consisting of a stem verb modified by inflectional, derivational and/or other types of affixes, commonly appear in Kaska. In these cases, a word-final verb morpheme may be accompanied by up to nine prefixes grouped into three categories: the disjunct, the conjunct and the verb theme. O'Donnell's Kaska verb structure diagram is shown below.

Disjunct Prefixes			Conjunct Prefixes				Verb Theme		
Oblique Object	Postposition	Distributive Plural	Subject Agreement II	Direct Object	Mood/Aspect	Subject Agreement I	Thematic Prefix	Classifier	Verb Stem

Verb Theme

The **verb theme** carries the stem verb morpheme, which is immediately preceded by one of four *classifiers* (-h-, -Ø-, -l-, -d-).

The -Ø- classifier primarily marks intransitive and stative verbs.

The classifier *-h-*, referred to as *l* classification in Athabaskan literature, marks transitivity and/or causativity and deletes when preceded by the first-person singular subject marking *s-*. Though it is found in some intransitive clauses, as in *sehtsúts* ("clothlike object is located"), these generally bear the *-Ø-* classifier.^[9]

- *etsén segan* 'the meat is dried'
- *etsén sehgan* 's/he dried the meat'

The *-d-* classifier serves a more complex function, accompanying self-benefactives, reflexives, reciprocals, iteratives (marked by the prefix *ne-*) and passives.

The *-l-* classifier combines the functions of the *-d-* and *-h-* (*l*) classifiers.

Conjunct

The **conjunct**, which appears between the disjunct prefix group and the verb theme, carries inflectional information including subject, direct object and mood/aspect markings. In *subject* markings, Kaska syntactically differentiates between "subject I" and "subject II" morphemes (the latter represented in the gray boxes in the table below to the left).

Subject Markers in Kaska			Subject I markers occur conjunct- finally, while subject II markers occur conjunct-initially.	Direct Object Markers in Kaska		
	Singular	Plural			Singular	Plural
First person	s-	dze-	The <i>direct object</i> markings are given in the table at right. The marking for third-person singular direct object depends on the subject of the sentence:	First person	se-	gu-
Second person	n-	ah-		Second person	ne-	neh-
Third person	Ø-	ge-		Third person	Ø-/ye-	ge-

if the subject is in first- or second-person, then it is *Ø-*, but becomes *ye-* when the subject is in third-person.

Disjunct

The **disjunct** typically carries adverbial and derivational prefixes, including the negative marker *dū-* and the **distributive plural** morpheme *né-*, which pluralizes otherwise dual subjects and, in some cases, singular objects. The presence (or absence) of this feature bears most of the numerical marking that is not already indicated contextually or through the subject and object affixes themselves. The prefix *ɬe-* marks for dual subject in at least one verb phrase: "to sit." Postpositional morphemes, such as *ts'i'-* ("to") and *yé-* ("about"), also appear in the disjunct, along with the oblique object markings listed in the table below.

Oblique Object Markers in Kaska		
	Singular	Plural
First person	es-	gu-
Second person	ne-	neh-
Third person	me-	ge-

Space, Time and Aspect^[9]

In Kaska, time is expressed primarily through aspect marking, called *modes* when described in Athabaskan languages. These prefixes convey imperfective, perfective and optative aspect. Overt expressions for quantified units of time exist, such as *tādet'ē dzeněs* ("three days"), but rarely appear in Kaska dialog.

The *imperfective* (prefix *Ø-*) expresses incomplete action, is used in instrumental marking, descriptions of static situations and to express irrealis mood. In Kaska narratives, imperfective verb forms commonly accompany a humorous tone.

The *perfective* mode (prefix *n-*) functions largely in complement to the imperfective, expressing complete action, is used in descriptions of kinetic events and establishing realis mood. Kaska narratives tend to express a more serious tone through perfective verb forms.

The *optative* mode (prefix *u-* in conjunction with suffix *-í*) expresses unrealized or desired activity.

Directional prefixes, stems and suffixes also index spatial relations in Kaska narratives. These include **allatives**, **ablatives**, **areals** and **punctuals**, with some examples listed below.

- kúh- 'distant location (known to both speaker and addressee)'
- de- 'distant location (known exclusively to speaker)'
- ah- 'distant location (determined by non-focal character)'
- júh-, jah- 'nearby location'
- degé- 'up ahead' (also used to mean 'in the future')
- náné- 'across'
- -áné 'to the side' (often used in conjunction with *ah-* prefix)

Syntax

When a sentence contains two independent nominals, it takes on Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) structure.

1. *eskie ayudeni ganehtan*
2. *eskie ayudeni ga-Ø-ne-h-tan*
3. boy girl at-3sg.Subj.-Mood/Aspect-Classif-look
4. "The boy saw/looked at the girl"

When only one independent nominal is present, the subject and object are differentiated by the prefixes in the verb, shown using the same sample sentence.

- *eskie ganehtan* ("She saw/looked at the boy")
1. *eskie meganehtan*
 2. boy **3sg.Obj...**
 3. "The boy saw/looked at her"

Subordinate clauses are marked with an *-i* or *-í* suffix and appear before the independent clause, as in the following example:

"While he was eating he was watching us."

1. *etsedzi gugánehtān*
2. *etsedz-i gugánehtān*
3. 3sg.eat-[**Sub. clause**] 3.sg.was watching us

The available literature on Kaska makes no mention of applicatives, relatives or complements, and case marking appears restricted to nominative (subject), accusative (object) and the various forms of locative case marking conveyed through directional morphemes.

Endangerment

With around 300 speakers as of 2011, the Ethnologue lists Kaska as Status 7 (shifting). It is mostly Kaska Dena Elders who are the fluent speakers^[5] despite four communities (Good Hope Lake, Lower Post, Watson Lake and Ross River) where the language is taught in schools.^[10] Kaska Dena children are not learning to be fluent because

many families do not use the Kaska language at home.^[6] The Kaska Dena people recognize the importance in revitalizing the Kaska language and have worked towards building Kaska language written and oral materials as well as programs such as culture camps and training programs.^[11]

See also

- [Tahltan language](#)

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Further reading

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